

Venezuela: Electoral abstentionism vs. seizure of the country

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On Sunday, August 2, 32 democratic political parties in Venezuela agreed not to participate in the parliamentary elections called by de facto president Nicolas Maduro for December 6, 2020. They are choosing to use the strategy of electoral abstentionism in the face of polls that they consider fraudulent. This will be the fifth time that the opposition parties have sought to delegitimize an electoral process and, thus, the National Assembly (known in Spanish as AN) elected through that process.

The first time was in the 2005 legislative election. The parties in opposition to the Hugo Chávez government (2002–2013) withdrew from the election, calling it “fraudulent”, and asked voters not to go to the polls. They cited lack of transparency in the process, lack of guarantees for the secret vote, and fraud in the census lists. However, “the day passed without incident and with irregular participation, more abundant in the popular areas, a bastion of Chavism, and very scarce in the middle and upper classes”, reported [El País](#) that day.

The opposition’s frustration with the results of the presidential recall referendum the previous year had underpinned the decision to abandon the electoral process, breaking the opposition’s commitment to the National Electoral Council (known in Spanish as CNE)—chaired by Jorge Rodríguez, the actual minister of information—to the Organization of the American States and the European Union delegations.

The opposition’s electoral abstention allowed the seizure of Parliament by Chavism for five years, from 2006 to 2011.

The second occasion of electoral abstention was the election of the National Constituent Assembly (known in Spanish as ANC) in 2017. The opposition gathered at the Democratic Unity Table (known in Spanish as MUD) and was forthright in its rejection of the initiative, defining it as a form of self-coup and confirming Nicolas Maduro’s “authoritarian drift”. [Leopoldo López](#), leader of the Popular Will party, stated: “This threat seeks two things: first, the annihilation of the Republic and the democratic State. Second, the absolute submission of the Venezuelan people”. On this occasion, some leaders of Chavismo, known as critical Chavismo, aligned themselves with the MUD strategy.

Although most Venezuelans abstained and some protested publicly, the Chavistas achieved their objectives: an ANC subjugated to the interests of the Maduro regime and the takeover of the

powers of the National Assembly (2016–2021), which has been dominated mainly by the opposition parties during this period. However, due to the irregularities that accompanied the creation of the current national Assembly, a large part of the international democratic community has ignored this new legislative body, currently presided over by Diosdado Cabello, the second most powerful man in Chavismo.

The third time the MUD (Acción Democrática, Primero Justicia, and Voluntad Popular parties) abstained was in the 2017 mayoral elections. After the allegation of fraud in the gubernatorial elections two months earlier, the ruling party, Chavismo, won 17 of 23 governorships against all the odds. In the words of MUD Secretary [Ángel Oropeza](#), “The regime took the path of fraud, violence, manipulation, advantage, cheating, corruption, and blackmail to ignore the will of our people [in the regional elections]”.

With these results, Chavismo took over 305 of 335 municipalities with an abstention of nearly 53%, according to CNE figures—an increase of 11% compared to the municipal elections of 2013 and 14% compared to the regional elections of October 2017. The opposition won five governorships out of 23; however, Juan Pablo Guanipa, the winner in the critical state of Zulia, refused to be sworn in before the ANC, and thus, this state was also left in the hands of Chavismo, when the vote was repeated in the municipal elections.

The result was Maduro’s victory with an abstention of 53%, the highest in the history of presidential elections since the arrival of democracy in 1958. According to [CNN](#) en Español, the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St. Lucia, Spain, and the U.S.—members of the Lima Group—considered these elections “illegitimate” and “lacking in credibility”.

U.S. Vice President [Mike Pence](#) said Maduro and his cronies were making sure his reign of corruption, crime, drug trafficking, and terror continued. Pence asked Maduro to suspend this farce and call for a real election to give the people of Venezuela real options because they deserved to live in a democracy once again.

The European Union and the European Parliament also rejected Maduro's re-election in 2018. OAS Secretary General [Luis Almagro](#) said: “Nicolás Maduro will win, it will mean an attempt to legitimize the presidency for six more years, knowing that this electoral process has not had the support of the international community or the internal political actors in Venezuela to structure this process”.

On this occasion, abstention and other irregularities in the electoral process allowed almost 60 countries to repudiate Maduro as the president of Venezuela as of January 10, 2019, when his 2013–2019 term ended. They recognized Juan Guaidó as interim president. In contrast,

Vladimir Putin (Russia), Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkey), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), Miguel Díaz-Canel (Cuba), Xi Jinping (China), Bashar al-Ásad (Syria), Hassan Rouhaní (Iran), Salvador Sánchez Cerén (El Salvador), and Evo Morales (Bolivia) accepted Nicolás Maduro as president.

Therefore, on December 6, 2020, the electoral abstentionism strategy should lead to a definitive transition to democracy in Venezuela. To achieve it, the 32 Venezuelan political parties, together with the 60 nations' governments and the OAS, the UN, the European Union, and the European Parliament must declare in an emergency to build the necessary consensus. The opposite will result in the Bolivarian country's definitive seizure by China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Cuba through Maduro and his criminal corporation.